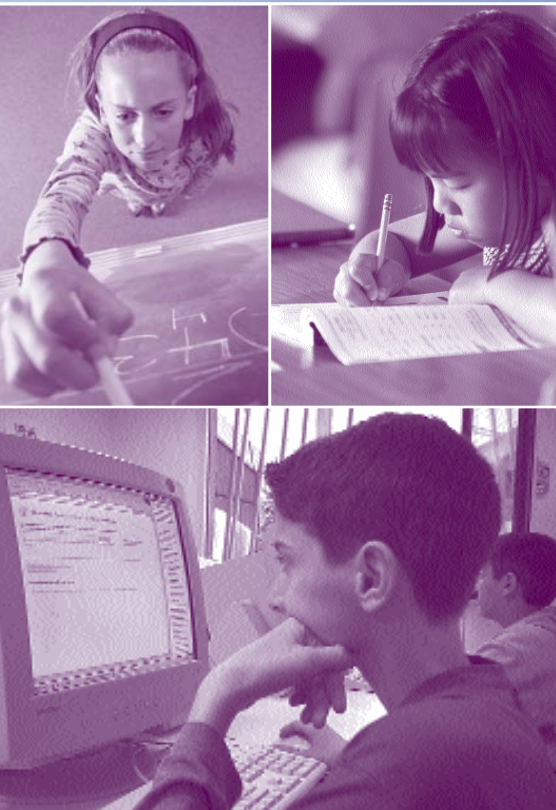


State Representative **Trent Van Haaften**



Session Report



- ☒ The New State Budget
- ☒ Agricultural Initiatives
- ☒ Fighting Meth Production
- ☒ My Involvement in Legislation

INDIANA'S NEW BUDGET



School Funding Cuts and Increased Property Taxes

While there were a number of important initiatives that were addressed in this session, the budget was the focus of the entire session. I believe the majority party has turned its back on years of reducing property taxes and adequately funding education in our area.

I voted "No" on the final budget because it will ultimately raise property taxes and it fails to adequately fund education. The budget passed by the majority party sends a mixed message. During the debate on the bill, comments were made that the budget did not provide for any "general" tax increases. But in follow-up comments, the author of the bill admitted that the budget creates the need for property tax increases. These contradictions could not convince me to vote for the budget.

Prior to my service as your representative, the sales tax was increased by one cent. This was done with the promise that this revenue would be returned to counties through the Property Tax Replacement Credit (PTRC). By committing the PTRC, the State has helped relieve the burden of property taxes. Unfortunately, the budget that was just passed caps the amount of the PTRC that the state will provide to counties. I view this as reneging on past promises. The result of this broken promise will be higher property taxes for you and me.

The budget's failure to adequately fund education is already hitting too close to home. School systems in Mt. Vernon, North Posey and South Gibson have already had to notify teachers and staff that they will no longer have

a job teaching our children as a result of the funding cuts. When the original settlers of Indiana formed our

state government they made public education a priority. Unfortunately, this budget takes education off the list of Indiana's priorities. I know that our educators and communities will work to fill in the gaps, but it is a shame that this budget fails to place education as a priority for all of Indiana.

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An additional concern about the budget is the failure to adequately fund health care for the elderly, disabled and children. It is anticipated that costs for programs to help our elderly in nursing homes, individuals with developmental disabilities and children needing proper health care will increase by 10 percent. Many of these needs will not be met because this budget only increases funding by 5 percent.

To get an idea of who is assisted by this funding, stop by a place like Evansville ARC sometime. Agencies such as these all across Indiana will be under great financial stress to provide the same level of services with less money because of this budget's failure to recognize the needs of many who are unable to help themselves. It is a shame that individuals who need the basic services of life will not receive those while at the same time businesses are estimated to receive \$33 million in tax breaks over the course of the next year.

Agriculture Moves to the Front



Agriculture is such a large part of Indiana's economy and now it will play a larger role in the economic development of Indiana. We now have a Department of Agriculture and Office of Rural Affairs. Focusing on agriculture's role in our economy will expand the opportunities for a large segment of Indiana's heritage. Farmers may also see some relief from property taxes as a result of the adoption of the \$880 per acre valuation on farmland.

Fighting the Methamphetamine Epidemic

In 2004 Oklahoma passed significant legislation to address its growing meth problem. By regulating the dispensing of pseudoephedrine and ephedrine products (cold and allergy medications), Oklahoma has seen an 80 percent reduction in the number of meth labs recovered by police. Based upon this success, states such

as Iowa, Arkansas, Missouri, Wisconsin, Washington, Kentucky and many others have passed similar legislation. Indiana has now joined these states as a leader in the fight against meth.

I was proud to work in a bipartisan fashion to see Indiana be a leader in the fight against meth as opposed to sitting back and doing nothing. All of us know the impact that this addictive drug has had on southwestern Indiana. With counties and municipalities already passing local ordinances to restrict access to these products, Indiana now has a uniform law.

Beginning July 1, stores will be required to store these drugs in certain areas of the store, primarily behind a counter. In addition, customers will be limited to three grams—about 100 tablets—of the drugs per week. To make a purchase, they will have to show a state or federal ID and sign a logbook.

It is significant to note that this bill passed unanimously in both the House and the Senate. As this legislation made its way through the session, Governor Daniels weighed in and made it a priority of his. The success of this bill was a prime example of what can be accomplished through bipartisan efforts. Indiana can now count itself as a leader in the fight against the scourge of meth.



Rep. Van Haaften discusses the meth legislation.

The Ups & Downs

This past session gave me the opportunity to be involved first hand with many pieces of legislation. In addition to leading the fight on the methamphetamine bill, the Inspector General (IG) bill also provided some intriguing moments.

After a contentious debate on the IG bill, the Governor became intrigued with some of my proposals to fine tune the legislation. This led to my first face to face meeting with the new governor. With the acceptance of my suggestions for changing the structure of the IG bill, this controversial bill was improved and passed by the House. Although Indiana has always successfully fought corruption and fraud within state government, we will now have one individual assigned to the task that is subjected to court scrutiny.

Relying upon my past experience as a prosecutor, I was also

involved in being a part of legislation that enhances penalties for voyeurism and extends the availability of the Sex Offender Registry to neighborhood associations.

Unfortunately, my suggestion to provide a tax deduction for student loan payments was removed in conference committee. Two other measures were never afforded a committee hearing. These were efforts to have the state take ownership of the New Harmony Bridge and a proposal to require insurance coverage for the fertility needs of Hoosiers wanting to start a family.

Although new to the legislature, I have learned that the passage of good ideas takes time. That is why I am already looking forward to returning to the State House in 2006 to continue working for you and all of Indiana.

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2005 Session Highlights



Reviewing legislation,
Representative Van Haaften reads
at his desk in the chamber.



Representative Van Haaften (right)
debates the Inspector General
Legislation with House Speaker
Brian Bosma (R-Indianapolis).



Discussing a proposed bill,
Representative Van Haaften
addresses the House of
Representatives in the chamber.

Representative Trent Van Haaften

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